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ABSTRACT

Designed to assess the quality of pieces of creative writing in the intermediate and junior high grades, the Sager Writing Scale (SWS) is intended for use by both students and teachers or by researchers. The SWS contains four scales with four ratings possible in the areas of vocabulary, elaboration, organization, and structure. Validity for the SWS is claimed for its being based on an examination of what experts have said about children's writing and an examination of over a thousand pieces of children's writing. Reliability for three adults trained as raters was .97. [This document is one of those reviewed in The Research Instruments Project (TRIP) monograph "Measures for Research and Evaluation in the English Language Arts" to be published by the Committee on Research of the National Council of Teachers of English in cooperation with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills. A TRIP review which precedes the document lists its category (Writing), title, author, date, and age range, (intermediate, junior high), and describes the instrument's purpose and physical characteristics.] (RB)

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CS 201 328

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
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Category: Writing

Title: "Sager Writing Scale"

Author: Carol Sager

Age Range: Intermediate-Junior High

Description of Instrument:

Purpose: To assess the quality of pieces of creative writing. The scales are designed to be used by both students and teachers or by researchers.

Date of Construction: 1973

Physical Description: The CWRS has four scales with four ratings possible on each scale. The scales and their definitions are as follows:

Vocabulary: the use of words to express a particular thought or idea

Elaboration: an abundance of related ideas which flow smoothly from one idea to the next

Organization: the arrangement of ideas in order

Structure: the way in which language forms are used to convey meaning

Ratings on each scale are 0, 1, 2, 3, -- corresponding to poor, fair, good, excellent. Each of these values is described in detail in the full report. After familiarization and training in the use of the scales, students or teachers can use them to rate pieces of creative writing. Highest possible score on a piece is twelve.

Validity, Reliability, and Normative Data:

Validity for CWRS is claimed for its being based on an examination of what experts have said about children's writing and an examination of over a thousand pieces of children's writing. As with any such measure, validity

is determined largely by the usefulness and appropriateness of the various scales.

Reliability for three adults trained as raters was .97. No rater reliability is reported for children using the scale.

Ordering Information:

EDRS

Related Documents:

Sager, Carol. Improving the Quality of Written Composition Through Pupil Use of Rating Scale. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1973. Order No. 73-23, 605.

Adapted from the Anderson Scale, a writing scale for teachers resulting from an M.Ed. thesis directed by Dr. B. Alice Crossley, Professor of Education, Boston University.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Dissertation

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF WRITTEN COMPOSITION THROUGH PUPIL USE OF RATING SCALE

Submitted by

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In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for

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1972

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CHAPTER IV

CONSTRUCTION OF THE REVISED SCALE

It was the purpose of this study to find out if children's compositions would improve as a result of teaching them the components and use of a descriptive writing scale so that they could rate their own compositions and those of other children. Necessary to this purpose was the revision and adaptation of the Anderson Scale[1] so that it could be used by children.

Preliminary Considerations Regarding Construction of the Revised Scale

The Use of Stories

Review of the literature revealed the importance of improving the quality of creative writing. Although there was no one accepted definition of creative writing, authors agreed concerning the need for children to be able to write about whatever they wished. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, creative writing was defined as writing in which the child was free to

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[1] Eleanor Anderson et al., "Construction and Evaluation of a Scale for Creative Writing" (unpublished Ed.M. thesis, Boston University, 1957).

write about subjects of his own choosing.

Review of the literature further revealed that the authors considered a "self-felt purpose for writing" and a "sense of audience" important factors in the improvement of written composition. Thus it seemed that story writing was the logical vehicle to implement the purposes of this study. It was felt that story writing could satisfy the adopted definition of creative writing and incorporate those factors considered important influences in the improvement of writing.

Review of the Anderson Scale

In 1957 a group of seven people constructed the Anderson Scale to help teachers and researchers evaluate composition and diagnose writing problems. The Anderson Scale was a descriptive scale consisting of four categories, namely, Originality, Vocabulary, Organization, and Elaborative Thinking. These categories were held to be important by the authors of that time and the seven writers of the scale. Each of these categories was given a numerical value of 0, 1, 2, and 3. The four categories yielded a maximum total score of twelve points.

After the scale was constructed, the seven authors used the scale and rated thirty compositions independently. They then discussed discrepancies in the scoring and revised the wording of

the scale accordingly. Following this revision, the seven authors rated fourteen additional compositions and found that ". . . the variation of sub-category scores was narrowed to within a range of one point."[1] It was at this point that the final scale was adopted.

Considerations Regarding the Format of the Revised Scale

Revised Scale Would Be a Four-Point Scale

When the Anderson Scale was constructed, the authors decided on a four-point scale to eliminate the tendency of raters to select the middle score in odd-numbered scales. Since that time an experiment was conducted by McColloy and Remsted[2] to compare a four-point and six-point composition rating scale for general merit.

McColloy and Remsted chose to compare the four-point and six-point scales because a two-point scale was not considered sufficiently discriminatory, and odd-numbered scales were thought to encourage raters to select the middle score. They compared the

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[1] Anderson et al., "Construction and Evaluation of a Scale for Creative Writing," p. 71.

[2] William McColloy and Robert Remsted, "Composition Rating Scale for General Merit: An Experimental Evaluation," Journal of Educational Research, LIX (October, 1965), 55-57.

four- and six-point scales on the basis of their sensitivity, reliability, and applicability.

Although the experimenters found no statistically significant difference in either sensitivity or reliability between the four- and six-point scales, they concluded that the four-point scale was superior to the six-point scale because it was easier to use. The authors found that there was ". . . comparatively greater difficulty in orienting the raters to the more extensive scale and in their using it."[1] For this reason, it was decided that the revised scale would be a four-point scale.

Revised Scale Would Have Four Components

It was decided that there would be four categories to the Revised Scale based on the assumption that intermediate grade children could handle no more than four categories effectively. It was further decided that each of the four categories would contain a description of four ratings which corresponded to the terms poor, fair, good, and excellent.

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[1] Ibid., p. 56.

Considerations Regarding the Content of the Revised Scale

It was felt that the categories of the scale should reflect those elements of effective writing which contemporary authors consider both necessary and appropriate for improving composition in the middle grades. In addition, it was the opinion of the writer that each category should also contain the following:

1. Examples of errors most commonly made in the middle grades so that the children using the scale would be made aware of what detracts from effective writing.
2. A 3 rating which described a composition slightly better than the best that is written by children of this age so that all children using the scale would be challenged to grow in composition.

Therefore, it was decided to base the content of the scale on the results of a review of contemporary literature and an examination of stories written by children.

Determining the Content of the Revised Scale

A Review of Contemporary Literature

Review of the literature revealed that contemporary writers are of the opinion that vocabulary, elaboration, organization, and

structure are important components of good writing and that children's composition would be greatly improved as a result of instruction in these areas. It also revealed those aspects of these components that were considered appropriate for use in the middle grades. Thus, Vocabulary, Elaboration, Organization, and Structure became the four components of the Revised Scale.

An Examination of Children's Stories

After reviewing contemporary literature to ascertain the major factors of effective written communication, the author examined approximately 1,000 sixth-grade compositions that had been collected during the year preceding this study. The stories were examined for vocabulary, elaboration, organization, and structure to determine the following:

1. What was the quality of vocabulary, elaboration, organization, and structure exhibited in children's compositions?
2. How did this quality compare with that urged by contemporary authors?

Since the intention was to create a story rating that would describe a story slightly better than the best stories written by children of this age, it was decided that for each of the components, the stories would be sorted into three groups according to

the quality of the component being considered. A fourth group would then be created which would reflect the difference in quality exhibited in the best stories and urged by contemporary authors. These four groupings would correspond to the 0, 1, 2, 3 subcategory scores of the scale.

Vocabulary in Children's Stories

When examined for vocabulary, the stories seemed to fall naturally into three categories. The stories weakest in vocabulary were characterized by the lack of variety of word choice, lack of descriptive words and expressions, and use of vague, general, uninteresting words. These stories sounded lifeless and dull.

The second group of stories were also weak in vocabulary, but they included some use of synonyms and a few interesting words and expressions which set them apart from the poorest stories.

The third group used vocabulary that was adequately descriptive and exact. They also showed some ability to use words in new and interesting ways.

According to the review of the literature, the following factors contribute to an effective written vocabulary:

1. Precision and variety of word choice
2. Use of sense words and descriptive words and expressions

3. Use of unusual expressions, word combinations, and comparisons.

The top group of stories showed that children of this age do have the ability to use all of these factors to embellish their stories. What was lacking was over-all excellence. Rarely did a child use all of these factors consistently throughout his stories.

It was decided, then, that the highest score on the vocabulary scale, the 3 rating, would stress the use of a variety of new and interesting words and comparisons to create vivid impressions.

Elaboration in Children's Stories

When examined for elaboration, the stories showed that, on the whole, children of this age tend to list events with relatively few supporting ideas or details. The poorest stories suffered from a lack of related ideas to the point where the story meaning was unclear and hard to follow. Ideas were often suggested but never carried out. It was often difficult to connect one story idea with the next.

The group of stories that would correspond to a 1 rating had the same flaws as the stories that would be rated 0, but to a lesser degree. Ideas were only sometimes unclear and hard to follow. Although these stories had some detail, the use of detail

was, for the most part, inadequate. Much more detail was needed.

The stories in the next group were good-stories. Ideas flowed smoothly from one idea to the next, but, in general, they made little impression on the reader. Details were often inadequate or overdone. Quite often the ideas rambled on without moving the story forward. Yet, within this group of stories, there was evidence that children could use ideas and details to spark their writing.

In the literature, authors agree that an effective writer enriches his story with a variety of ideas and details that make people, places, and events come alive. An examination of the best children's stories showed that children of this age were not consistent in their use of details for this purpose.

It was decided, therefore, that the fourth category, or the 3 rating, in elaboration would stress the use of a variety of related ideas and details to create vivid impressions.

Organization in Children's Stories

When examined for organization, it was found that the poorest stories had ideas arranged in such a jumble that there was no point to the story. Quite often the story just started and stopped. There was no beginning, middle, or end.

The stories in the second group had a main idea but many

irrelevant and poorly arranged events. Usually there was a weak beginning and/or ending.

The authors of the stories in the third group were able to write a story that had a good beginning, middle, and ending. Although some events were poorly arranged, there were no irrelevant events. In many stories the action did not build to a climax. Quite often action rambled without even reaching a climax.

Although a story really is not a story unless it has a climax, the lack of a high point occurred in many otherwise good compositions. It seemed to the author that much more serious handicaps to writers of this age were the failure to eliminate irrelevant events and to start the story with a beginning that captures interest.

In the literature, the following were cited as effective elements of organization:

1. The presentation of ideas in a logical, effective sequence.
2. A main idea that ties all story parts together.
3. A good beginning and conclusion.
4. Action that builds to a climax.

An examination of children's stories showed that children should be made more aware of those aspects of organization that make a story interesting to a reader. Therefore, the highest cate-

gory in organization would stress the arrangement of ideas in a way that is interesting as well as easy to follow.

Structure in Children's Stories

The most noticeable feature of stories weakest in structure was the lack of any sentence sense. The stories were such a jumble of omissions and sentence fragments that they could barely be deciphered. When read aloud, one idea bumped into the next so that the story sounded ridiculous and senseless.

Although the second group of stories contained many run-on and incomplete sentences, there was evidence that the writers of these stories had developed some sentence sense. Writers in this group showed little evidence, however, of being able to vary language forms. Quite often their stories were characterized by monotonous primer style.

The authors of the best stories showed an understanding of simple, compound, and complex sentences, as well as the ability to use a variety of sentence lengths, beginnings, and types. However, they were not always able to use sentences to emphasize meaning or subordinate ideas in a variety of ways. As a result, their stories sounded stilted in parts.

Contemporary authors stress the importance of using a variety of sentences to state ideas accurately, effectively, and

fluently. An examination of the best stories showed that children of this age should be made more aware of how to connect and subordinate ideas for smoother presentation and how to use sentences to emphasize meaning.

Therefore, the highest rating in structure would stress the use of a variety of sentences to state ideas effectively, fluently, and accurately.

Wording of the Revised Scale

Since the purpose of the scale was instructional as well as functional, it was necessary to word the scale in a way that would help children see vocabulary, elaboration, organization, and structure not as distinct categories important in their own right but rather as interlocking components which contribute to effective writing. It was necessary, then, to define "effective writing" in terms children could understand and use. Because of the importance of creating a sense of audience, it was decided to think of effective writing as writing that was interesting and understandable to the reader and to link each item on the scale to the part it played in accomplishing this.

In each section of the scale care was taken to choose words that would help raters use the scale as objectively as possible. Although it was realized that expressions such as "lacks over-all

excellence," "details are inadequate or overdone," "ideas are poorly arranged," "sentences emphasize author's meaning" would have to be explained by the program, care was taken to word the scale so that once the children learned the meaning of these terms, they could use the scale without referral to the program.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary was defined as "the use of words to express a particular thought or idea." The value of using precise wording was stated as "exact words paint vivid pictures." The need to use sense words was stated as "words help the reader use his senses." The importance of using synonyms was expressed as "synonyms provide variety and interest." Unusual expressions, word combinations, and comparisons were cited for the zest and color they add to the story.

The different ratings on the Vocabulary Scale were defined on the basis of how consistently and effectively words and expressions were used to create vivid impressions for the reader. A story deserving a 3 rating would have "a variety of new and interesting words and expressions." A 2 story would have "some use of new and interesting words and expressions." "A few interesting words but little variety of word choice" characterized the 1 rating. A 0 story was described as having only "common, overworked,

uninteresting, dull words."

Elaboration

The importance of an abundance of ideas was also stated in terms of reader involvement. Elaboration was defined as "an abundance of related ideas which flow smoothly from one idea to the next." A 3 story was described as one in which the reader is able to "see, hear, and feel what the author intends." It included details that "make people, places, and events come alive," that "make the reader feel what the characters feel," that are sufficiently vivid to "create an impression on the reader."

A story rated 2 was described as one in which "ideas fail to make an impression on the reader. A 1 story, in which much more detail and many more ideas were needed, was described as one in which "ideas are sometimes confusing and hard to follow," "important questions are left unanswered." A 0 story was one in which "ideas are not clear or easy to follow."

Organization

Organization was defined as "the arrangement of ideas in order." In the description of the 3 rating, the importance of logical arrangement of ideas was expressed as "the arrangement of ideas in a way that is interesting and easy to follow." A 2 rating

was defined as having ideas that were "poorly arranged" or "action that rambles without reaching a climax." A 1 story was described as having "many irrelevant events," "a weak beginning and/or ending." A 0 story was one in which a jumbled arrangement of ideas gave the reader an "over-all impression of disorder."

Structure

Structure was defined as "the way in which language forms are used to convey meaning." The importance of using a variety of language forms to state ideas accurately, effectively, and fluently was emphasized by describing stories in terms of how they would sound when read aloud. A 3 rated story could be "read aloud with ease." Furthermore, it could be read aloud with expression because sentences emphasized the author's meaning. A 2 story sounded "stiff or uneven when read aloud." In addition, sentences only sometimes emphasized the author's meaning. The poor sentence sense common to 1 stories was translated into "ideas are sometimes difficult to understand," "monotonous primer style," "story is difficult to read aloud." The lack of sentence sense found in the weakest stories was stated as "meaning is unclear or absurd," "story sounds confused or senseless when read aloud."

Comparison of the Anderson Scale and the Revised Scale

Format of the Scales

Both the Anderson Scale and the Revised Scale were descriptive scales for rating children's compositions. Each scale consisted of four categories held to be important components of writing. Each category had a numerical value of 0, 1, 2, and 3, which corresponded to the terms poor, fair, good, and excellent. The maximum score for both scales was twelve points.

Purposes of the Scales

The Anderson Scale was constructed for the purpose of helping teachers and researchers evaluate children's compositions. It was hoped that teachers could use the scale to check their instructional effectiveness and to diagnose children's writing strengths and weaknesses. Researchers, on the other hand, could use the scale to judge the results of their educational experiments.

The Revised Scale was constructed to be used by children to rate their own compositions and those of other children. It was hoped that teaching children the components and use of a descriptive scale would result in the improvement of composition.

Categories of the Scales

The categories of the Anderson Scale are Originality, Organization, Elaborative Writing, and Vocabulary. These categories and the items listed under each category were considered important by contemporary authors. The following definitions were used:

1. Originality: "An original composition contains unusual thoughts and/or unique arrangements of ordinary words to give freshness to a common word."[1]
2. Vocabulary: "Use of ideas to express a particular thought or idea."[2]
3. Organization: ". . . the sequential arrangement of ideas."[3]
4. Elaborative Writing: ". . . an abundance of appropriately related ideas fluently expressed."[4]

The categories of the Revised Scale are Vocabulary, Elaboration, Organization, and Structure. These were defined as follows:

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[1] Anderson et al., "Construction and Evaluation of a Scale for Creative Writing," p. 127.

[2] Ibid., p. 134.

[3] Ibid., p. 135.

[4] Ibid., p. 137.

1. Vocabulary is the use of words to express a particular thought or idea.
2. Elaboration is an abundance of related ideas which flow smoothly from one idea to the next.
3. Organization is the arrangement of ideas in order.
4. Structure is the way language forms are used to convey meaning.

The Structure Component of the Revised Scale

The categories of the Revised Scale were chosen after a review of literature and an analysis of children's writing. Based on this investigation, it was decided to eliminate the category of Originality found in the Anderson Scale and replace it by Structure.

At first, the authors of the Anderson Scale considered sentence structure to be an element of creative writing, but later decided that ". . . sentence structure was a quantitative, mechanical aid to writing and not really indicative of creativity."[1]

It is the author's opinion that structure is an essential element of all writing. To write creatively the child needs ideas he wishes to express and a way to do so. Without a minimal knowledge of language forms, the child cannot express himself at all. With knowledge of only a few language forms, the child is limited

[1] Ibid., p. 61.

in his choice of expression. Without choice, there is little creativity or originality. Furthermore, based on her experience with children, the author felt that children in the middle grades suffer less from a lack of originality than from a lack of resources with which to express their originality effectively. It should also be noted that much of Originality as found in the Anderson Scale has become part of the Vocabulary, Elaboration, and Organization sections of the Revised Scale.

Wording of the Scales

The Anderson Scale was worded in terms designed to help teachers and researchers look for various components of good writing. Terminology such as "plot," "metaphor," and "simile" was used. Sometimes one sentence was used to describe an entire rating.

The Revised Scale, on the other hand, was worded so that it could be used by children. Ideas were expressed in ways designed to help children realize that writing must be interesting to a reader and to show them how to use vocabulary, elaboration, organization, and structure to improve their writing. Specific terminology was not used. Instead, each item was listed in words that described its function in a story that was interesting and understandable to the reader. For instance, what the Anderson Scale listed as "colorful, picturesque, effective similes and/or

metaphors"[1] was stated in the Revised Scale as "unusual expressions, word combinations, and comparisons add zest and color to the story."

In the Anderson Scale, the 2 rating for Elaborative Writing is described as follows: "Ideas which are clear and flow smoothly but lack full development because of incomplete treatment of the subject."[2]

In the Revised Scale, the 2 rating in Elaboration is as follows:

> Ideas are clear but fail to make an impression on the reader.
> Ideas follow each other easily and naturally but lack punch.
> Some details help the reader use his feelings.
> Some ideas are fully developed.
> Some details are either inadequate or overdone.

In the Anderson Scale, the 3 rating in Organization is described as follows:

> "Continuity and logically clear arrangement of relevant thoughts.
> No irrelevant details.
> Build-up of ideas exactly suitable to express mood of story.
> Main idea fully expressed.
> All minor ideas supporting major idea."[3]

In the Revised Scale, the 3 rating in Organization reflects the organizational needs of middle grade children. It is worded in terms that are educational as well as descriptive:

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[1] Ibid., p. 134. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid., p. 135.

Ideas are arranged in a way that is interesting and easy to follow.
Events are told in logical order.
A main idea ties all story parts together.
The beginning captures interest.
Action builds to a climax.
The conclusion sums up the story.
No irrelevant details.

Estimating the Reliability of the Revised Scale

Training the Raters

In order to determine an estimate of reliability for the Revised Scale, a practice session was held in which three adults were trained as raters. Children's stories were duplicated so that all raters would be judging the same stories. The raters used one component of the scale at a time and gradually worked up to the point where they could use all four components of the scale. During the practice session, the raters worked independently but discussed all differences of opinion thoroughly. At the end of the session, the raters used all four components of the scale and rated six stories. There was no discussion at this point.

Reliability among raters for each component of the scale, as well as for the scale as a whole, was determined by using Ebel's formula for intraclass correlation, which is as follows:[1]

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[1] J. P. Guilford, Psychometric Methods (2nd ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1954), pp. 396-397.

$$r_{kk} = \frac{\text{variance for items judged - variance for remainder (or error)}}{\text{variance for items judged}}$$

k = number of raters

Estimate of Reliability for the Revised Scale

Table 1 shows the estimate of reliability for the Revised Scale as a whole.

TABLE 1

ESTIMATE OF RELIABILITY AMONG RATERS (N=3). FOR THE REVISED SCALE

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Variance
From items judged	133.0	5	26.6
From raters	.8	2	-
From remainder	7.2	10	.72
Total	141	17	-

r = .97

Using Ebel's formula for intraclass correlation and the data in Table 1, the following calculations were made:

$$r = \frac{26.6 - .72}{26.6} = .97$$

From these figures it can be inferred that the reliability of the Revised Scale was in the order of .97.

Estimate of Reliability for the Vocabulary Component of the Revised Scale

An estimate of reliability was determined for the vocabulary component of the Revised Scale. This is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

ESTIMATE OF RELIABILITY AMONG RATERS (N=3)
FOR THE VOCABULARY COMPONENT OF THE REVISED SCALE

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Variance
From items judged	20.5	5	4.1
From raters	.3	2	-
From remainder	1.7	10	.17
Total	22.5	17	-

r = .96

From the data in Table 2 an intraclass correlation was computed as follows:

$$r = \frac{4.1 - .17}{4.1} = .96$$

From this figure it can be inferred that the reliability of the vocabulary component of the Revised Scale was in the order of .96.

Estimate of Reliability for the Elaboration Component of the Revised Scale

The estimate of reliability for the elaboration component of the Revised Scale is shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3

ESTIMATE OF RELIABILITY AMONG RATERS (N=3)
FOR THE ELABORATION COMPONENT OF THE REVISED SCALE

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Variance
From items judged	8.28	5	1.66
From raters	.45	2	-
From remainder	2.22	10	.22
Total	10.95	17	-

r = .87

An intraclass correlation was computed from the data in Table 3 as follows:

$$r = \frac{1.66 - .22}{1.66} = .87$$

Taking the intraclass correlation as an estimate of reliability, it may be said that the reliability of the elaboration component of the Revised Scale was in the order of .87.

Estimate of Reliability for the Organization Component of the Revised Scale

Table 4 shows the estimate of reliability for the organization component of the Revised Scale.

TABLE 4

ESTIMATE OF RELIABILITY AMONG RATERS (N=3) FOR THE ORGANIZATION COMPONENT OF THE REVISED SCALE

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Variance
From items judged	3.12	5	.62
From raters	.12	2	-
From remainder	1.21	10	.12
Total	4.45	17	-

r = .81

From the data in Table 4 an intraclass correlation was computed as follows:

$$r = \frac{.62 - .12}{.62} = .81$$

From this it can be inferred that the reliability of the organization component of the Revised Scale was in the order of .81.

Estimate of Reliability for the Structure Component of the Revised Scale

The estimate of reliability for the structure component of the Revised Scale is shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5

ESTIMATE OF RELIABILITY AMONG RATERS (N=3) FOR THE STRUCTURE COMPONENT OF THE REVISED SCALE

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Variance
From items judged	10	5	2
From raters	.33	2	-
From remainder	2.67	10	.27
Total	12	17	-

r = .87

Using the data in Table 5 an intraclass correlation was determined as follows:

$$r = \frac{2 - .27}{2} = .87$$

From this it can be inferred that the reliability of the structure component of the Revised Scale was in the order of .87.

Thus, the estimated reliability of the four components of the Revised Scale ranged from .81 to .96, with a total estimated reliability of .97.

Sager Writing Scale*

VOCABULARY

DEFINITION

Vocabulary is the use of words to express a particular thought or idea.

RATE 3: A variety of new and interesting words and comparisons create vivid impressions.

Words help the reader use his senses.

Synonyms provide variety and interest.

Exact words paint vivid pictures.

Unusual expressions, word combinations, and comparisons add zest and color to the story.

RATE 2: Words are adequately descriptive and exact but lack over-all excellence.

Some words are descriptive and exact.

Some use of new and interesting words.

Some variety of word choice.

Some vivid words and comparisons.

RATE 1: A few interesting words but little variety of word choice.

Uses vague general words more often than exact words.

Few descriptive or picture words or phrases.

RATE 0: Only common, overworked words with no variety of word choice.

Dull, uninteresting words.

*Adapted from the Andersen Scale, a writing scale for teachers resulting from an M.Ed. thesis directed by Dr. B. Alice Crossley, Professor of Education, Boston University.

ELABORATION

DEFINITION

Elaboration is an abundance of related ideas which flow smoothly from one idea to the next.

RATE 3: A variety of related ideas helps the reader see, hear, and feel what the author intends.

Details make people, places, and/or events come alive.

Details make the reader feel what the characters feel.

Details and ideas create an impression on the reader.

All ideas are fully developed.

Ideas follow each other easily and naturally.

RATE 2: Ideas are clear but fail to make an impression on the reader.

Ideas follow each other easily and naturally but lack punch.

Some details help the reader use his feelings.

Some ideas are fully developed.

Some details are either inadequate or overdone.

RATE 1: Much more detail is needed.

Ideas are sometimes confusing and hard to follow.

Details are often inadequate.

Important questions are left unanswered.

RATE 0: Ideas are not clear or easy to follow.

No details.

Ideas are suggested but never carried out.

Ideas are jumbled and/or unconnected.

ORGANIZATION

DEFINITION

Organization is the arrangement of ideas in order.

RATE 3: Ideas are arranged in a way that is interesting and easy to follow.

Events are told in logical order.

A main idea ties all story parts together.

The beginning captures interest.

Action builds to a climax.

The conclusion sums up the story.

No irrelevant details.

RATE 2: There is a main idea, but some events are poorly arranged.

Some events are told out of order.

A main idea ties all story parts together.

A good beginning and conclusion, but action rambles without reaching a climax.

No irrelevant details.

RATE 1: A main idea but many irrelevant events.

Many events are out of order.

Weak beginning and/or ending.

RATE 0: Over-all impression of disorder because of jumbled arrangement of ideas.

There is no main idea or point to the story.

There is no beginning, middle, or end.

Many irrelevant details..

STRUCTURE

DEFINITION

Structure is the way in which language forms are used to convey meaning.

RATE 3: A variety of sentences which state ideas accurately, effectively,, and fluently.

Each sentence is complete.

Sentences emphasize author's meaning.

A variety of sentences is used.

The story can be read aloud with ease.

RATE 2: Sentences state ideas accurately but not always effectively or fluently.

Almost all sentences are complete.

Some variety of sentences used.

Sentences sometimes emphasize author's meaning.

Parts of the story sound stiff or uneven when read aloud.

RATE 1: Ideas are sometimes difficult to understand.

Some sentences are complete.

Some run-on sentences and sentence fragments.

Little variety of sentences.

Monotonous primer style.

Story is difficult to read aloud.

RATE 0: Meaning is unclear or absurd.

Few sentences are complete.

Many omissions and sentence fragments.

No variety of sentences.

Story sounds confused and senseless when read aloud.

Summary

Basic to the purposes of this study were the revision and adaptation of the Anderson Scale so that it could be used by children. Prior to the construction of the scale, the following decisions were made:

1. The scale would be geared to the improvement of children's stories. It was felt that a program based on story writing would satisfy the definition of creative writing adopted for this investigation and be able to incorporate pedagogical methods considered important influences in the improvement of writing.

2. The format of the Revised Scale would be similar to that of the Anderson Scale. That is, the Revised Scale would be a four-point descriptive scale consisting of four components. The ratings within each component would have a numerical value of 0, 1, 2, and 3. The four components would yield a maximum score of twelve points.

3. The content of the scale would be determined on the basis of a review of contemporary literature and an examination of children's stories. It would contain those items felt to be necessary and appropriate for improving composition in the middle grades.

The major tasks involved in the construction of the scale

were the determination of the content and the wording of the scale. Based on an examination of the literature and approximately 1,000 children's stories, vocabulary, elaboration, organization, and structure were selected as the four components of the Revised Scale. Each item on the scale reflected the views of contemporary writers and the author of this paper. Each component of the scale included a 3 rating that would challenge even the best writers of this age. Also included in the ratings were examples of errors most commonly made by middle grade children so that children using the scale would be made aware of what detracts from effective composition.

The wording of the scale was designed to be instructional as well as operational. Items on the scale were expressed in ways that would help children realize the function of vocabulary, elaboration, organization, and structure in making writing interesting and understandable to the reader. Care was also taken to choose words that would help the rater use the scale as objectively and independently as possible.

Although there are similarities between the Anderson Scale and the Revised Scale, especially in format, the purposes of the scales necessitated certain differences. These differences are manifested in the components and the wording of the scales. A major distinction is the elimination of the Originality category

of the Anderson Scale and the creation of the structure component of the Revised Scale.

Upon completion of the Revised Scale, an estimate of reliability for the scale as a whole as well as for each of its four components was computed by means of an intraclass correlation. Three adults were trained as raters. After a practice session, they rated six stories. The findings were as follows:

1. The reliability of the Revised Scale was in the order of .97.
2. The reliability of the vocabulary component of the Revised Scale was in the order of .96.
3. The reliability of the elaboration component of the Revised Scale was in the order of .87.
4. The reliability of the organization component of the Revised Scale was in the order of .81.
5. The reliability of the structure component of the Revised Scale was in the order of .87.

Thus, it may be said that the estimated reliability of the Revised Scale ranged from .81 to .96, with a total estimated reliability in the order of .97.